

Halo When You Wish Upon A Spartan

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Summary: A boy in the present goes through some hard times, and gets a surprise when the master chief appears. Now he struggles between his inner dream to be a supersoldier, and a very special someone. can the 2 coexist? Chapter 5 Up, Thx Spartan275

1. The Fight

Chapter 1

****The Fight****

Date: November 1st, 2004

Location: Calm Springs, Alabama. United States

The stars on the scarlet sky glistened against the black background of the moonlit night. Not a cloud was in sight, and the air was but a gentle breeze. The birds in the trees flew back and forth, each time shaking loose more of nature's cold shoulder, as the leaves fell to the basin of the Earth. This night was perfect.

Upon a small hill sat a car. Gently it rocked back and forth, as the grinding of teenage bodies mingled back in forth, physically showing their love for one another. The girl, Katie, and the boy, Alex, merged together as one. The night had been pleasant for them both, as they had attended a movie, eaten dinner at a nice restaurant, and spent an hour gazing at the sky searching for meaning.

Slowly, the rocking stopped, and the car settled back down to the ground as calm as could be. The two bodies separated, and spoke.

"Wow... That was great... I'm exhausted now. Thanks."

"No..." Katie replied. "Thank you."

They were both underage. Alex was 17, and Katie was a year younger. Alex was the average jock type, having absolutely no fat in his body, and no common sense when it came to relationships. He also lacked common sense when an important event that he deemed a high priority was about to happen, as it just had.

The couple separated from their concoction of sweet, adrenaline, and raging hormones. Katie looked down beneath the blanket that covered them, and screamed.

"OH MY GOD! YOU DIDN'T USE PROTECTION?" she screamed.

"Well, I umm.. I ummm... no. I guess I didn't think."

"Apparently not! I could get pregnant, did you think about that? NO! Now what the fuck am I suppose to do about this if that happens, my parents will kill me!" She continued.

"Now just what in the 'Sam Hell' do you want me to do about it? I apparently am the center of this argument since I turned the key to a fury of words straight from HELL!" he screamed back at her.

She did not even blink.

"Go! Go then you cocky bastard. Get the hell out of my face. I don't ever want to see you again."

Alex slowly slumped back in his seat, pulled a hat from his seat, which he then threw on backwards, then smiled. "This is my car. YOU get out." He said coolly.

Without saying a word, but using force, she gathered her things, clothes among other things, and exited the car. But before she shut the door, she turned about face, and slapped him square on the cheek, then retreated and slammed the door. Alex was so confused. He had never had this happen before. No one had ever slapped him before. He had always had them come back. Want him back. This time someone had stood up for themselves, and it made him mad. He punched the dashboard in front of him so hard that the airbag exploded outward, and punched him backward. Now not only had his girlfriend hit him, but his own vehicle had too.

Cussing using every term under the sun, he dressed himself, and drove the car away from it's precarious perch. He was doing about 90 in a 45, that led down several sharp turns down the hill. _Why_, he thought. _Why, How would he get her back._ He knew that this time in his mind this was serious, and he couldn't loose her. The fact that she had stood up for herself when no one else had made her more the woman she ever was, which only fueled his rage further. His speed increased._ I love her. I know. I'll apologize, and step up._ To think this meant throwing his jock status away. He didn't care. He loved her more than anything that belonged to him, including his status in any bar. A sharp turn approached. _I'll just march on over there. No no, that won't do. I'll head her off. Catch her in the retreat, and make it ok. Or I'll at least try. It's the least I can..._

The friction between his car's tires and the pavement became nonexistent as the car drifted beyond the lines of his lane, then beyond the guardrail. The car smashed through the guardrail and fell

down a steep embankment, and exploded in flames.

2. I'm Real, But Are You Serious?

Chapter 2

****I'm real, but are you serious?****

Date: May 22nd, 2553

Location: Unknown

Black smoke filled Alex's nostrils, as the mixture of blood, glass, and air filled his lungs. He gagged. Opening his eyes was difficult, because of the bright light in front of him, but he pushed through the pain and forced them open. He lay upon a table in a cold steel room. Tubes ran out of him, and wires attached to his head gave readings on monitors, which were next to him. He felt of his leg. No response. His legs were paralyzed. He tried to sit up. Nothing. Once again, he willed his eyes to close and then open again. The pain seared through his body as he did so. With all the strength in him, he struggled to turn his head, but his fingers curled into a fist in the pain, and this in itself was painful. A voice echoed through the room.

"He's awake." Said a voice from a nonexistent figure.

A door parted at the far end of a room, and a masked woman came through dressed in a white gown. She held a sharp needle, and looked at her patients open eyes.

"You're tough. You shouldn't have woken up this early. I'm afraid I am going to have to sedate you again while I finish my work." She said

Unable to say anything in protest, he watched as she injected him with the needle, which held a crystal clear liquid. He also noticed as his eyes stretched to look downward that he was barely dressed only in an undergarment. His entire body looked blue from bruises and swelling, and as he looked back at his arm, they looked bigger than he remembered. Then the woman said something.

"Goodnight. See you in the morning." And as he stared at his bluish bruise, the color of the wall started to blend with it, a soon everything faded to black.

Two Weeks Later

Alex blinked. The room was bright. Clean. Reflective even. People were in this room. Six of them. Four of them on tables such as himself, and 2 people in the white outfits the woman from when he was awake last. He sat upright. Fast. He was fast. Agile. He brought his hand up in a flash. Looking it over, he saw it was larger than he remembered. More lean.

"Hello." Said the same voice of the bodiless figure from before. "I need you to follow the woman at the end of this room. She will take you to your room."

His eyes searched the room for the source, but found none. Looking at the end of the room, he saw a man in a marine outfit and a weapon that he thought he recognized waving at him to come on.

He moved his legs off of the bed, and realized that he found it difficult to walk. But It was not as if he couldn't walk as he was expecting. His legs were twitchier. Easier to move. As he walked down the room and followed the marine, the thought dawned on him about where he could be? When was it? He distinctly remembered flying off of a hill to a situation where he would have broken bones, scuffs and cuts, possibly death. Now here he was in a strange place in perfect condition with uncanny responsiveness to his commands.

He glanced up and looked at the marine. The marine turned his head a bit and realized that he was being watched. He shrank his head, and brought his weapon to a more ready to fire position.

"It's a pity if they're wrong." Said the marine.

Alex cocked his eyebrow in question as he followed him down the end of a long corridor and entered the door on the right. Inside was the basic setup; a table, a chair, a bed, and a can. The bed looked like it had never been used, and as he had observed through the travel here, it looked like the barracks for the entire area of military personal. If he had just had a car wreck, why was he in a military facility?

He noticed a book lay on the table. "History: A Glance Back In Time" it read. He picked it up, and sat on the bed, opened the front cover, and read the contents. _Hmmm, _he thought_. Interesting. _Then he came to Chapter 3.

1950-2152: An Age Of Peace And Exploration, It read. He dropped the book, but the dead sound of the book was muffled by an intercom's beep from a speaker above his head. It was the female from before.

"I need you to report to the briefing room. We have someone... special here for you." She said.

"NO! You wait. I want to know who the hell you are and when tha..." but the intercom went dead.

This was all very strange. History books into his future, military, and who was the special guest. The only way for him to find out was to go where he was told. So he did, and as he rose from the bed, he shook his head, trying to shake off this madness.

He saw many other people as he traversed the barracks, and they all lowered their heads to him. Sure he had the body of a professional weightlifter, but what about it? There were others in the world like this? Why was he so special?

Looking on the doors, he finally came to one that said Briefing Room. He walked to it, and the door slid open for him. The room was dark, and there was an oval table in the center of it with four chairs on either side. A projection board was attached to the wall, and there were no windows, or people for that matter, in this room. He walked to the projector and touched it. Then without warning, it came on, displaying a picture of someone in a green armor. He then recognized

it as the Master Chief, the character he played on what he considered the best game of all time, Halo.

"Hmm... I recognize myself. Damn I hate pictures..." said a voice from behind him.

Alex's eyes flew open, and he whipped around, almost burning the air around him. There, in the flesh, metal, and bone stood the Master Chief himself.

"But.. Bu Buhh.. How?" he said, and hyperventilated.

"I know, I'm not suppose to be real. But I am. Here in the flesh. I need your help." Said the chief.

Then, for Alex, it all clicked into place. The military. The history book. Everything. "So, I suppose that the woman over the intercom was Cortana?"

"You bet your bottom dollar!" she said, and suddenly a small pedestal hidden in a dark corner of the room blinked to life, and Cortana's Arithmetic body shaped code appeared.

Alex fought to sort through this overwhelming amount of information, and cut to the chase.

"So... What do you want me to help you with?" Alex proposed.

"We're losing the war on the Covenant here in my time, but in your time they're not there yet. If you could stop the approach, it would make things easier for the past, and the future. You were chosen because of your ability to play the videogame, and because of your heart. You don't give up. You my friend will become a Spartan. This is, unless you don't want to. Then we can knock you out, beat the hell out of you, and throw you back in that car of yours." Said the chief.

"Awe shit man. Always wanted to be a Spartan. Wow. Yeah, I'm all for it." Alex said. And for the next hour, Cortana explained all about how it would work. When she finished, Alex had a question. "So, when do I get my 'augmentations'?"

"One step ahead of ya, you already have them." She said, and this explained the muscle response, and the many other enhancements he had noticed

"There is one more thing," she said, "When you wake up, you will poses all of the training you will need, and it will be the same as the master chief's training. The only thing separating you will be experience."

"Just how will this work?" Alex asked. He turned his head to the master chief. The master chief rose from his slumped position, and ran to Alex. When he reached him, he punched him in the head, and knocked him out.

"That is not any of your concern, son. You will know all you need to know, and that's enough for us all." Said the chief.

Cortana nodded, and the door split and two white dressed nurses

carried Alex away.

"Well, we've done it. Maybe his future will be happy to have him to help." She said to no one in particular.

But the Master Chief answered the question in his head. _I don't think it's the public that he cares about. It's someone. One person, and that's all it takes._

3. Rememberance

Chapter 1

****Rememberance****

Date: December 25th, 2005

Location: Calm Springs, Alabama. United States

"That boy sure is getting big!" Shouted Anita from across the room, and over the lungs of a crying infant. Aaron was a stout little guy, with the belly of a bottomless pit, and the lungs of a rock band. But this day was mild. He almost didn't sleep at all, and he was huge. 22in's at birth, and 14 pounds was not a small baby. But he was healthy if nothing else. His heart beat, according to the doctors at the hospital a few months earlier, "As strong as I have ever heard."

Katie, on the other hand and when she was away from Aaron, was sad. She had a baby that would grow up without a father, and that saddened her. She was no longer the person she used to be. She started focusing on her schoolwork more, and this in turn took away from her social activities and friends. She was no longer on the cheerleading squad, nor was she accepted in the common circles anymore. She would stay to herself in the hall, or in a desk, with her nose in a book. Her platinum blonde hair had almost doubled in length, and she no longer painted her fingernails every night like a ritual. She was just another kid on the block.

The jocks gave her hell. They indirectly held her responsible for what had happened to their buddy, Alex, and put their side of blame on her. They would gang up on her in the hallways, and on the courts of a gym, and literally beat her till the point of blackness. She kept it to herself though. She had rather them hurt her as her child.

Aaron, excited by the flying plastic toys above his crib, reclined his attitude to play mode. This gave Katie a much need break to unwrap her gifts. There weren't many, but to her, it was the thought that counts. One of them was a new watch, given to her by her mother. Her family was very supportive of the newborn, and of her as well.

She enjoyed her day of refuge and rest at her home as she unwrapped gifts, and then watched the rest of her family while keeping an eye on her son. Soon the cleanup process began, and everything went back into normal routine. After her lunch, she read aaron a story, and was about to go to her room to read a book, when the doorbell rang. She peaked through the viewhole of the front door, and saw her best, and

only true friend, Amber.

Amber was the closest thing to a family she had outside her own. If anything ever went wrong, she was there to talk about it, and help the overall situation. In short, amber was her lifeline, and her best friend. She came in, and they went to Katie's room.

Katie closed the door, and they both sat on her bed.

"Merry Christmas katie!

"Merry Christmas to you to amber."

"Thanks. Guess what. I have a present for you." Said amber

"Really!" Said Katie, her eyes lighting up.

"Yes, here ya go." And with that amber pulled out, from her pocket, a small bag.

Inside the bag was another watch. This one was not a ladies watch however. Then she remembered. This was Alex's watch. He was wearing this the night he was killed.

"Ohh my god. Amber." She felt a tear form in her eye, and then fall and slide down her cheek.

"How did you get this?" she asked.

"I have my sources. I knew that this would mean a lot to you, so this made sense to get it."

Katie caressed the small metal item in her hand for a moment, wiped her face full of tears clean, and placed the watch next to a picture of alex that lay upon her dresser.

"I miss him. I miss him so much, and I wish that I could see him one more time. Just one."

Katie got up, and went to her window, and stared at the sky, which was a pale blue. _Just one_ she thought.

4. Training

Chapter 4

****Training****

Date: September 3rd, 2559

Location: Underground Spartan Training Facility, Mars

Flesh tore, blood splattered, and bodies rained. The jungle around him moved in circles, twitching and twisting as the air blew through the leaves. Each movement was considered an enemy, as Alex looked at each one carefully searching for the enemy. Alex was no longer the person he used to be. He was a cold hard killing machine, with no feelings. He did what he was told, or he would be punished. And that meant he would be thrown into a cell, strapped to a titanium chair,

and beaten until the nurses had to intervene to induce blood transfusions. Then while he would sleep, they would inject him with hallucinogens. He would get this if he was lucky.

"Remarkable, isn't it. This is the first, and might I add only, successful trail of the SS project. No the only thing left to do is make him remember who he is, and make him forget who we are. From then on, he will recognize 'punishment' as 'failure'. After that, nothing can stop him." Said Admiral Carlson, commander of the UNSC fleet, section 2, and chief of the SS2 project. The master chief stood by his side, and answered.

"It's so sad to see something so great, come from something so terrible." He said. He had personally instructed him throughout the years, and had watched him learn, forget who he was, and die on occasion, only to be brought back and trained more. He had no idea they had practically done the same thing to him.

The shine off alex's armor made him realize just how far they had tapped human potential. His suit, less than half the density of his own, was yet multiple times stronger, and it had been modified to his exact specifications. Only him could wear this suit. Alex was the sole reason for the collapse of the covenant. They had sent his body in a pod to a covenant ship. He was unconscious, but that was something the covenant didn't know. They were all killed on that ship within an hour, and within a week, the covenant ships had withdrawn from the earth's solarsystem. The only ship that ever was found of the covenant after that was the ship Alex had used to travel back. The shields on his suit were stronger than a covenant flagships. In a way, the master chief felt outclassed, but at the same time, honored to have this warrior on his side.

"Computer, end simulation." Said the admiral.

After 1 second, the room faded from the lush jungle before it. Bodies were removed, and Alex stood in the center of the room looking around for any lurking prey.

"Ok master chief, you're on." He said.

The master chief slowly turned and exited out through a door at the back of the room, and entered the simulator. He walked up to alex, who upon sight, gave him a brisk salute.

"At ease son." Said the chief.

Alex lowered his arm, but remained stiff.

"I have one last order for you." The chief took out a small AI chip from his clip belt, and held it out to alex.

"Take this, and insert it into your AI Interface."

Without question or delay, he took the chip and inserted it into his head. He immediately grabbed his helmet, and fell to the ground in pain, screaming. The master chief then exited the room.

Alex looked up from the pain, searing through every part of his body, and no longer recognized his environment. This pain was nothing like he had ever experienced. It was like there was a being inside his

head that was ripping his head apart. His vision blurred, and he fell over.

"Good. When he wakes up, he will remember his training in a different light. His amnesia of his past 7 years will not affect his performance however. I hope we can prevent this covenant onslaught from happening again."

But once again the master chief thought to himself, he won't fight for the world. _He will fight for one person. _

"Sir, he's waking up!" said one nearby marine.

"Good. Go back in chief."

The chief walked in, and noticed that alex was looking around the room trying to figure out where he was. He saw the master chief, and then recognized him. He stood silent for a moment.

"Wow. I don't remember learning these things, but the come naturally now. Thank you." He said. This time, his voice was lean. Dark. Sinister. As if he knew what he was going to do, and no one could stop him. He did not know these things, but his heart told him otherwise.

"Would you like to go back to your time now?"

"Yes, sir." He said.

They collectively and silently walked to another room, with a giant spiral in the center, but alex did not go in. instead he walked farther down the hall to the armory. Here, he picked up 7 crates of ammunition supplies, and other things, and walked back to the now dubbed by an overhead sign, _The Time Chamber_.

He laid the crates beside himself, and looked around this room. This room was huge, the size of a football field. Inside of it were a pelican, a warthog, and more crates than he could count within 2 seconds. 2402 crates, he finally concluded. There were rocket launchers, rockets, ammo of all types, battle rifles, smgs, antique assault rifles, snipers, and more grenades than golf balls at a driving range.

He smiled.

After a moment of chatter between the people behind a glass panel, the room started to glow. An iceblue at first, then a fire red. Soon the light grew too intense, and he moved his hand to shield himself from the light. When the light dimmed, he moved his hand, and noticed he was not in the room he was a second earlier. He was in a desert. He was home.

5. Ghost In The Shadows

Chapter 5

****Ghost In The Shadows****

Date: May 1st, 2006

Location: Miami Beach, Florida

"Sir, This locations getting hot! Recommend we evacuate civilians." Shouted a mic inside of Sergeant Davison's ear.

"Affirmative." He renounced back

The beach was no long a soft sun-bleach of warmth, but a blood soaked battleground. The surprise attack from some disguised terrorists had killed 51 civilians, and 1 police officer, and that was only from gunfire. They had made demands that some hostages be released from a federal penitentiary, or they would detonate 7 of the hotels, each of which were loaded with civilians. They said that if anyone tried to leave the buildings, they would be shot. And they weren't bullshitting. Some had already tried.

Davison and his team of marines moved from room to room in one of the buildings adjacent the captives location. There were few civilians in the building, and after a few moments, the building was completely evacuated.

They reached the top floor of their building, and radioed in.

"General. Sniper teams in position. Ready to make a move on your mark."

"Sniper team, hold your ground. We're commencing negotiations with the hostage takers." Said the general through an oversized earpiece.

"Roger that."

An hour and twenty minutes passed by, and the hostage takers were still in the building. The team, although they were growing weary, remained firm, and on scope.

"Sniper team. Prepare to fire on the hostage takers a floor below your present target. He is holding a gun to a group of civilians. We cannot allow him to open fire. Copy." He said

"copy that." Davison said with his sniper rifle in hand.

He himself dropped to his knees, deployed his sniper gear, and moved to the target. Less than 3 seconds later, he found his target, and his scope never left the head. He waited for his orders.

Another minute passed by, followed by another transmission. "Open fire on my mark. Three. Two. One. Mark." Said the general. But something was wrong. On his mark, there was no target. The blinds were drawn, and he lost sight of his target. "Sir. I've lost contact with the target." Request permission to enter building and eliminate threat." Davison requested.

The general was silent for a moment before he sent this reply.

" It seems that we have no choice. Greenlight to engage. Leave your sniper gear, you will be met by a loadout team that the base of the building. Load up with shotguns and close quarter gear. Good luck

soldier."

"Thank you sir, Davison out."

His team packed gear, and hauled ass down several flights of emergency stairways, and came to the ground floor. He handed his gear over for a shotgun, a shoulderstrap full of shells, 4 grenades, and a pistol which he attached 2 ammo clips to his belt. His team chose similar setups. They finished attaching the gear, and headed out. Each blade of grass, open car door, pole, and distraction was used as cover as they slipped between the two buildings. They reached the door of the captive building without detection, and slowly started to make their way. Davison took a silencer from his pocket and attached it to his pistol, and nodded to his team, and they did the same. No sense in entering a building undetected, then shooting a dinner bell.

The team crept down the halls, one by one, encountering nothing until they reached the 3rd level of the building, the level below the hostage situation.

"What the hell?" Bodies, everywhere. What happened here?

"Sir, they were shot, looks like 7.62MM NATO, they're all dead."

"Alright people, stay sharp. We don't want to run into whoever took these guys out and piss him off."

And so they continued, until they heard gunfire directly above their position, looking at them, Davison nodded, cover didn't matter anymore. They double-timed the rest of the way to the hostage room, running across dead bodies everywhere. In there they found the Hostage-Takers had become the Hostages. A Green clad titan was pointing a strange rifle at the leader.

"About time you got here Sergeant" the Titan spoke without even looking at Davison.

"Who are you?" Davison asked.

"It doesn't matter, take these people, that was your mission, not to find out who I am, I have a feeling this isn't the last time we will be seeing each other, Paul Davison."

And so theâ€¦.whatever it wasâ€¦left, Davison watched as he calmly walked towards the window and hopped out, firing a grappling hook and swing off across the city.

What the hell just happened?

-----SCENE BREAK-----

The Green armored titan walked into the warehouse, Pelican sitting calmly in front of him, after 100 ferrying trips between Africa and here he had made this warehouse his base. Stepping into the Pelican he turned on the advanced short-wave radio he was given by the Master Chief to monitor anything that he could be needed at.

Hmmâ€¦.a disappearance investigation in Alabamaâ€¦.this sounds

interesting.

Powering up the Pelican he took off, headed back to his home state.

6. Vigilante Justice

Chapter 6

****Vigilante Justice****

Date: May 16th, 2006

Location: Northern Alabama

Alex sat up on a tree branch, the leaves moving like sails in the breeze and a slight drizzle of rain falling around him.

He dropped to the ground, making no sound and being perfectly camouflaged against the forest background in his armor. After being home for 6 months, he didn't feel comfortable without his Armor anymore.

He stalked off, the mud squelching under his boots, the Hydrostatic Gel cooling him in the Warm and Humid Alabama spring.

The Investigation of the disappearance wasn't going well for the local FBI, that didn't mean that it wasn't going well for him. His mental augmentation apparently gave him an increased attention for detail. He had long since discovered the missing kidâ€|Adria Micahson, a 13 year old girl, had been kidnapped by an escaped criminal, the local FBI hadn't even pieced the two together yet.

He loved being mentally advanced. He continued stalking towards his target. Birds chirping in the trees above him, a mysterious air to the songs they made.

'Fitting' Alex thought as the natural music filtered through his helmet. His HUD picking up a squirrel as it darted past his path. A Lightning blast lit up the sky with blue light, a loud rumbling sounding through the air for miles. The sky was dark with cloudsâ€|You couldn't see clear sky at all, at leastâ€|not if you were in the same area code as he currently was.

He crept around the trees now, he was getting close. Hitting the zoom function on his HUD he faced towards his target, a cabin in the middle of the woods, the windows were dark and the Wood it was made out of was damp with the rain. The cabin had obviously seen better days, there were cracked windows, it had to have leaks in the ceiling with all that roof damage, and the door was patched up over what looked to be a large hole.

What the hell had happened to this poor cabin? Switching to infared he saw a heat signature in what was apparently a bedroomâ€|one of three.

He crept towards the cabin, using trees as camouflage in case the guy woke up while he was moving; creeping to the window he used his Fiber Optic Probe to see if the girl was in the same room.

What he saw absolutely sickened him to the core. Not only was she in the same room, she was in the same bed, naked. And the man was naked too. The covers were strewn everywhere and torn female clothes as well as intact male clothes covered the floor

Alex pieced the two together, as well as the tear tracks on the girls face. What a Disgusting piece of shit.

Alex busted in the window with a slight slap from his hand, glass clattering to the floor on the other side, Alex paid little notice as he stalked towards the bed, ripping the rapist up by his hair, immediately causing him to wake up.

Alex punched the sorry excuse for a human being in the gut, tossing him to the floor and stomping on him with all 1000lbs. of him and his armor. The rapist screamed in pain as cracks were heard, the hardwood floor underneath him allowed him no mercy, the man's heartless and cold brown eyes were filled with pain.

Alex scoffed. This was too easy. He pulled his silenced M6C magnum out and shot the pathetic creature before him three times in the back. Hitting him in places that would assure he died, yet also assuring that he would lie in pain for hours until that happened.

Alex turned from the pathetic man, he was no longer a threat, he turned towards the bed, and the girl was wide-eyed with fear.

Alex felt a pang of sympathy for her. She was just a kid. And she'd just been raped who knows how many times over the past 2 weeks. Looking at her he noticed just how much she looked like Katie, the platinum blonde hair framed her face as tears fell from her ice blue eyes.

Alex took off his helmet to show the girl that he was just a few years older than her.

"shh, it's alright. He can't hurt you anymore; I'm going to take you back to your family. Is that Alright?" Alex assured the girl.

The girl nodded her head emphatically, she wanted out of here.

"Here you go kid." Alex spoke softly as he wrapped the girl in one of the covers. He motioned for her to sit tight for a little bit while he looked for some half-decent clothes—he realized that the rapist had little concern for her modesty and he sincerely doubted that Adria would feel comfortable wearing the rapist's clothes. Pulling off the equipment backpack he had on, an addition to the SPARTAN-VI armor he was currently equipped with. He pulled out his clothes, some Jeans, a belt and a T-Shirt. They would be big for her but hey, they would work. And that was what the belt was for anyway.

"Here you go kid, put these on, I'll be out in the hall if you need anything" he stated empathically as he walked off to the door.

As he exited Adria started dressing. 10 minutes later—she couldn't really go any faster with how sore she was from being abused for the past 2 weeks—she opened the door and nodded to Alex that she was ready to go.

Alex smiled reassuringly at the teenager. He slipped his helmet back on and led the girl outside. As he walked through the foliage he still couldn't help but notice how much she looked like Katie.

His heart panged as he realized he missed her—but she hated him didn't she? She had to. It had been a year since he 'died' and he had never apologized. He never had the opportunity.

He saw the girl's steps falter and he reached down help keep her up, but he didn't pick her up. He figured that after being treated the way she was, this girl needed to do something herself to regain her self-esteem.

"You know, you look just like my Ex-Girlfriend" he told her, trying to break the ice, Adria looked at him questioningly.

"I still love her but—she hates me now anyway, it's part of the reason I became—this." he said while motioning at his armor.

The girl smiled slightly as she listened to him. He was getting through. Hopefully that could help.

"There must be someone back at home that likes you kid, don't worry. They won't think of you any less now." He assured as he saw her smile sadly.

She smiled at him fully now, looking at him with eyes that asked the question "Do you really think so?"

Alex nodded to her. They were out of the forest now and his Warthog was in sight. He motioned for her to sit down in the passenger seat, the leather comforting her even further. As he turned the key and drove off back to the town.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Alex walked towards the house; it was beautiful, the white siding shining with the rays of the sun from the now clear sky beaming on it. He used his grappling hook to take Adria to her bedroom and placed her on her bed. Ruffling her hair he said softly to her. "You have got to be the strongest kid I've ever known"

Again she smiled; she did that a lot during the warthog ride to her home. That had to be a good sign. He waved goodbye as he jumped back out the window and rode the grappling line down to the ground and got back in his warthog. Driving back to the forest where he had hid his Pelican.

As he drove he was thinking to himself about what he was going to do. His time to face the covenant had not come yet, but it was close. And he had a feeling that he needed to be ready when they did.

The asphalt under his tires changed to damp ground as he neared the woods. Mud flew into the air as he drove through it. The frame of the 'hog rattled with every bump.

'Yes' he thought. He had a lot of getting ready to do.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Alex sat in another tree in calm springs, looking through his Amber visor, gleaming in the sunlight. He was at Katie's house as he watched her come home from school—he saw her go inside and into her room. A nice room with a makeup table and mirror that obviously hadn't been used in a while, Her dresser was made of Cherry wood and a few things on it—a picture, a watch and a piece of paper.

He saw a crib at the foot of the bed and immediately a thousand thoughts and emotions ran through his head.

'Aw hell' he thought when she picked up a toddler out of the crib and kissed him on the forehead.

He jumped down to the ground and hopped on his Mongoose—the other vehicle he had brought with him besides the warthog. And he rode off. He couldn't afford to feel like this when the covenant came.

'Yes' he decided. He had to give Katie up. She wasn't his, never had been. He let go of his dreams and embraced his destiny. He was Alex no longer.

He was a SPARTAN now.

7. Emotional Pain

Chapter 7

****Emotional Pain****

Date: June 1st, 2006

Location: Miami Beach, Florida

It was dark, it was damp, and it was humid. The Warehouse was the perfect place for a base. Nobody came into this section of the city anymore and it was big enough to hold all the gear he had brought with him.

7 years—In all actuality he had been gone for 7 years, but thanks to the effect sending him back in time he was reverse-aged back to roughly 20 years old. He sat on a bench in the one office room of the warehouse—the room he used as a bedroom of sorts, with a cleaning kit and his MA6C ICWS Assault Rifle.

He thought about how home—no longer felt like it. It was just a place he's been, he could never turn around. And he didn't want to. With the obvious pain he had caused Katie—it was time he left her alone. He never took his armor off anymore. There was no reason to; he led a busy and quiet life protecting the people of Miami from crime and the like.

He thought about the covenant—yes they would be attacking soon, but he had a few years to get ready for that day. As he slid the bolt back in place and then finally the upper receiver he sat the rifle down and picked up the next weapon on his list. The SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle.

He sighed as he thought about it. It had been more than a month and a

half and he still couldn't get Katie off his mind, he loved her and he knew it because as much as he triedâ€|She just stuck around in his mind. He couldn't give her up, but he had to.

His heart stung as he thought. He had a son or daughterâ€|He didn't know which and he didn't care to find outâ€|no sense in getting to know about stuff that as much as you want to, you can never be a part of...But he had a son or daughter that would never even know him, and that saddened him more than anything.

One drop of salted liquid fell down on the other side of his amber visor. Alex cried.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Location: Calm Springs, Alabama

Aaron wailed as his mother looked for food, He was almost 2 years old now and he was still a giant of a kid and had the lungs of a banshee. Katie shushed him as she went back to work at heating up the bottle, the milk in the bottle was an endless white, looking like heaven nearly to herâ€|something panged at Katie as she thought of Alexâ€|she knew he couldn't be alive, so she hoped he was in heaven at least. She still couldn't live with herself as she knew he couldn't have been going home with the place he crashed atâ€|he had to have been trying to cut her off on her way home and apologizeâ€|but he never got the chanceâ€|She had long forgiven him. She just hoped he could forgive her.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Location: Miami, Florida

The shadow crept throughout the hallways of the dark building, an almost indiscernible shuffle of feet was heard as it sped past the field of view of a guard.

A few minutes later the steady stutter of gunfire was heard from down the hallway as Alex calmly took out three arms dealer guards. He kept his MA6C pointed at the hallway as he searched through the room, loaded with crates and racks he hoped the search for the illegal arms wasn't going to take too long. A small window on his HUD opened showing the view from the camera mounted on his MA6C.

Hearing shouting from down the hall he decided it was time to hurry, he had to find these arms and plant the explosives ASAP

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Alex jumped out of the warehouse window as the joint blew up with explosive fire, screams were faintly heard from inside as Alex rolled to absorb the impact with the ground and then sprinted for the underground tunnels he used to move around the city.

The faint sound of Police sirens resonated through the sewer tunnels as they approached the scene, for all they would see it would look like someone mishandled the illegal arms and kablooie, no more arms dealers.

Cruel and cold yes, but effective. Justice was served and that's all

he cared about as of right now, they knew what those weapons were for and if they were for it enough to sell the weapons to murderers then they deserved to die.

Right now he had work to do. He walked down the cold dark and damp tunnels towards his own warehouse, he was going to half to polish his armor after this but hey, that was easy.

And so he walked.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Katie felt the hot tears slide down her cheeks, She had set aside a nightly time to remember Alex's and this was it. She opened her eyes to look at the cold grey stone with ALEX etched in bold lettering on the surface. And 1987-2004 etched below that.

She clawed the ground, picking up a handful of dirt and slowly letting it fall as she read the "May he Rest In Peace", She knew he couldn't be resting in peace'she wouldn't be if she was on the other end of things.

She looked to the side as she heard footsteps on the soft green grass, looking up she saw Alex's parents'sat least once every month on the first they would come here. They were surprisingly'sat least to Katie it was surprising'sforgiving, She had told them what had happened and what she thought happened after she ran off'sand it didn't matter to them.

Alex's dad, Derek, a big 6'5 220lb. man with a few grey hairs poking out of his otherwise blacktop head and a slightly unkempt style laid his hand on her shoulder and looked at her with a supportive glance in his Grey eyes that just made her cry even harder.

Alex's mom, Amanda, leaned down her brown hair fluttering around her shoulders and her Brow eyes staring softly at Katie. She wrapped her arms around Katie's shoulders and they wept as they remembered.

That night Katie had the worst nightmare ever, little did she know it was more of a premonition's

8. Foretelling Nightmares

Chapter 8

****Foretelling Nightmares****

Date: June 2nd, 2006

Location: Calm Springs, Alabama

The purple and blue walling around me looked organic as I scanned the room, I stopped when I saw a familiar figure in the middle of the room, strapped to a table and a large hunchbacked reptile bent over him.

"_No, I'll never tell you where I came from!" the figure declared_

I heard as the hunchback spit something back in his own language and blue light illuminated the rooms as sparks flew off of the table. The figure screamed in pain as the energy coursed through his body.

After an uncountable amount of time the energy stopped as the figure slumped in near defeat.

I wanted to scream, but I couldn't this wasn't real. Suddenly the figure sprang to life again and broke his bonds, snapping the reptiles neck as he ran towards the corridor. I seemed to follow him on his way through the hallways until we got to what seemed to be a control room, the figure scanned the screen in front of him and quickly hit some controls.

I turned and looked through the window into space. Three objects gleamed in the distance and slowly got larger as whatever we were on closed.

The figure then muttered out the worst phrase I had ever heard.

"_Well, this is itThere is no way off this ship.but I stopped the covenant."_

As we closed I jerked back to the control panel and saw a countdown timer count. Then as it hit zero everything went white as the figure screamed from the intense heat and pain.

"**AAAALLLLLLLEEEEEEXXX!!!! NOOOOOOOO!!!!!!**"

I shot up and looked aroundI was in my bedroom, covered in cold sweat as I flashes of the dream ran through my mind. I panted a few times too catch my breath when I heard crying at the foot of the bed, great. I woke Aaron up.

I got up and walked to the foot of the bed. Picking up Aaron out of his crib and sitting on the rocking chair next to it.

Cradling my son in my arms I thought about how he was all that was left of the man I had dreamt of. The fabric of the chair was soft and inviting as I rocked him back to sleep. He seemed to know I was more troubled than he was at moment and silenced, instead he curled his hand around a couple of my fingers in a seemingly comforting gesture.

It was weird how a little baby could figure me out this easily. I silently cried as I remembered AlexI loved him, I knew that nowbut I had screwed it up when I panicked. Instead of staying calm and talking over it I blew up at him.

And now he's dead, because of me. It was my fault, and now I had to live with that.

It was because of me that Aaron would grow up without a father. All because of me. I remembered the dream and then thought about it, it felt too real to be a dream, yet too fake to be realmaybe it was a combination of both? Like a premonition?

But that couldn't it? Sure Alex's body had never been found butâ€¦in that kind of a crash it was highly possible it could have been cremated.

How can you see into my eyes like open doors

Leading you down into my core

_Where I've become so numb without a soul my spirit sleeping
somewhere cold_

Until you find it there and lead it back home.

The song ran through my head, the song my Evanescence fit perfectly here.

Without Alex my soul was somewhere coldâ€¦and I was numb without it. And until Alex found it and lead it back home to meâ€¦then I was going to remain this way it seemed, but Alex was dead.

(Wake me up)

Wake me up inside

(I can't wake up)

Wake me up inside

(Save me)

I wouldn't wake up without him. My spirit at the moment reminded me of sleeping beauty, in eternal rest until my true love comes and wakes it up.

Call my name and save me from the dark

(Wake me up)

Bid my blood to run

(I can't wake up)

Before I become undone

(Save me)

Save me from the nothing I've become

Without Alex I WAS nothing, he was my everything now that I thought about it, and the memory of himâ€¦manifested in Aaron was the only thing that kept my blood running.

Now that I know what I'm without

You can't just leave me

Breathe into me and make me real

Bring me to life

I was without Alex, that's what. I thought about how I originally thought he couldn't just leave me when I heard about the crashâ€¦.howâ€¦even if just for that one nightâ€¦he had made me feel alive.

(Wake me up)

Wake me up inside

(I can't wake up)

Wake me up inside

I started to softly sing the lyrics to the song as I felt Aaron get drowsy again, it was a soothing song and fit well with my life right nowâ€¦actually it fit well with my life ever since that night two years agoâ€¦how could I have just left like that?

(Save me)

Call my name and save me from the dark

(Wake me up)

Bid my blood to run

I did anything BUT save Alexâ€¦I condemned him because of an honest mistakeâ€¦it was as much my fault as his that we weren't ready.

(I can't wake up)

Before I come undone

(Save me)

Save me from the nothing I've become

I started to tear up worse than before as I sung the lyrics. I realized just how much things could have been different if I hadn't have refused to accept at least some of the blame.

Bring me to life

(I've been living a lie, there's nothing inside)

Bring me to life

Frozen inside without your touch without your love darling only you are the life among the dead

Ever since then I had been living a lieâ€¦That lie was a life without Alex, there was nothing inside of me except guilt and sorrow right now. I missed everything about himâ€¦everything.

All this time I can't believe I couldn't see

Kept in the dark but you were there in front of me

I've been sleeping a thousand years it seems

Got to open my eyes to everything

Now that I thought about itâ€¦it did feel like I have been sleeping ever since Alex diedâ€¦like I was in a trance. I couldn't believe I didn't see what he meant to me before it was too late.

Without a thought without a voice without a soul

Don't let me die here

There must be something more

Bring me to life

I was without a thought, voice and soul since that November nightâ€¦.and a piece of me had died.

(Wake me up)

Wake me up inside

(I can't wake up)

Wake me up inside

(Save me)

Call my name and save me from the dark

I began to get sleepy myself as those words escaped my lips, Aaron was almost to sleep himself. I remembered Alexâ€¦and that night I wish I could take back and change.

(Wake me up)

Bid my blood to run

(I can't wake up)

Before I come undone

(Save me)

Save me from the nothing I've become

I was nothing nowâ€¦the question was would I always be or would someone save me?

(Bring me to life)

I've been living a lie, there's nothing inside

(Bring me to life)

A/N: 'Bring me to life' belongs to Evanescence, not me, this chapter and the next will be song ficcy because I personally felt the music fit with the idea I had for the chapters.

Thank you for reading and please review, SPARTAN-275

9. Stricken

Chapter 9

****Stricken****

Date: June 22nd, 2006

Location: somewhere in Alabama

A young woman walked down the cold and damp alley on her way back home. A set of glinting green eyes watched her carefully as she walked along at this night. The rats squealed and scattered off as they felt the tension rising.

The woman was walking home lazily as she thought of a certain someone. She missed him and wished they could just have one night back. She looked as the stars twinkled above her and the puddle next to her rippled and splashed as a rodent sped through it.

An owl hooted on the sign to her left, seemingly to warn her of something that was wrong.

The warning was too late, the last thing she felt was a wet cloth over her lips and nose before everything went dark.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Location: Somewhere over Georgia

Alex sat in his Pelican as he flew towards Alabama, a disappearance reported in Calm Springs was too close for comfort to him as he thought of Katie and his Child.

Idly he wondered why he even cared anymore, it was obvious he could never have them backâ€|.right?

He checked the RADAR like apparatus and punched a few buttons on the dashboard. Looking down he noticed just how beautiful the earth looked. How could the covenant POSSIBLY want to destroy it?

That brought another thought upon him as the cold grey interior of the cabin remained silent. Earthâ€|He was the one, the ONLY one to have the chance to save it.

He punched on the autopilot and moved into the back compartment, this was going to take about 20 minutes, might as well take a power nap.

He closed his eyes as the low rumble of the engines washed over and eased him to sleep, the cloth of the bench below him was roughâ€|not that he could feel it through his armor.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Location: Calm Springs, Alabama

Alex landed his Pelican in an abandoned barn south of Calm Springs. He sighed as he lied back and blew out a long low sigh. The hot air

of the breath lightly fogged up his visor.

He slowly raised his hand and unclipped the seat belt, as well as hitting the release to drop the warthog, Slowly getting up and stretching before he made his way out the back of the pelican to the cave, where he saw the sun slowly dip below the horizon as the sky turned orange and slowly darkened.

Hopping into the warthog he pushed down on the pedal with his oversized right foot jerking the vehicle into four-wheel drive and taking him off towards Calm Springs

-----SCENE BREAK (one week later)-----

Location: Somewhere south of Calm Springs

Alex slowly crept his way through the grass plain and towards the small building, everything he had gathered over the past week led only to this place. He had to move fast because he wasn't sure how much time he had, but he couldn't afford to be detected.

As he neared the wall of the house and flipped on the motion sensor he used his Fiber Optic probe to peer through the window, what he saw terrified him to the core, though he would never admit itâ€|

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Katie screamed against the gag as she cried what she thought could be her last tears; She had spent a week in this hellhole for what? a ransom? Why her of all people?

She closed her eyes as she tried to bite back the tears, unless a miracle happened not only would her son grow u without a father, but without a mother too.

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Alex flashed a million times through his head as he saw the figure tied to the cold plastic chair in the middle of the obsidian room.

The night which was now 8 years ago for him, but in reality was only 2 years ago flashed through his mindâ€|

You walk on like a woman in suffering

Won't even bother now to tell me why

You come alone, letting all of us savor the moment

Leaving me broken another time

He thought of how she ran off on himâ€|how his spirit broke as he watched her slam the door in his faceâ€|of how she slapped him after they did the deed.

You come on like a bloodstained hurricane

Leave me alone, let me be this time

You carry on like a holy man pushing redemption

I don't want to mention the reason I know

He thought of how he saw her just months agoâ€|seemingly carrying on without him like nothing ever happenedâ€|how he wanted to be left aloneâ€|and how she had slapped him like a raging storm that cold November night.

That I am stricken and can't let you go

When the heart is cold, there's no hope, and we know

That I am crippled by all that you've done

Into the abyss will I run

He realized that he couldn't let her goâ€|no matter how hard he triedâ€|how he was just running away from his problems by avoiding herâ€|how he thought he had no hopeâ€|and how his heart had turn cold because of that lack. He was emotionally crippled and would never be the man he could be without her.

You don't know what your power has done to me

I want to know if I'll heal inside

I can't go on with this holocaust about to happen

Seeing you laughing another time

She had latched onto his heart in the incredibly short time he had been with herâ€|and how was she supposed to give it back if she didn't know she had it? He wanted to know how long this pain would lastâ€|how long it would take before he could mend thingsâ€|He couldn't go on with the attack on his emotions of this scale. He remembered seeing her laughing a few months ago and while at the time it made him sad it wasn't him that made her laughâ€|the realized that it was just soothing to see it or hear it.

You'll never know why your face has haunted me

My very soul has to bleed this time

Another hole in the wall of my inner defenses

Leaving me breathless, the reason I know

She was his only weakness, her face had haunted him since he had become thisâ€|thing. His soul cried out in pain seeing her chained and crying. He lost all breath as he realized one thingâ€|.

That I am stricken and can't let you go

When the heart is cold, there's no hope, and we know

That I am crippled by all that you've done

Into the abyss will I run

Alex snapped back to full awareness as rage and understanding filled his body, He wasn't anything without Katie, and while she may hate him it was better to know that for sure than to live without closure.

Into the abyss will I run

Alex backflipped and sprinted headlong into the window, bashing the window in as glass flew everywhere, he pulled out his dual SMG's and squeezed as the panicked criminal's came to see what was going on.

You walk on like a woman in suffering

Won't even bother now to tell me why

You come alone, letting all of us savor the moment

Leaving me broken another time

Four kidnappers fell as the rounds blew through their bodies, sending blood everywhere and cloth was ripped to shreds. As the SMG's ran out of ammo Alex rolled to the group and raised his palm open-handed into one's jugular, collapsing it and allowing the man to die a slow, painful death, as he sprang up from his roll he twisted brought his right arm to hook around a man's head as he grabbed the chin he yanked it to his right as the crack resounded through the room.

You come on like a bloodstained hurricane

Leave me alone, let me be this time

You carry on like a holy man pushing redemption

I don't want to mention, the reason I know

The corpse fell to the floor and laid there without moving, Alex quickly checked his motion sensor and swung around, slugging the last kidnapper in the face, causing his entire skull to implode as the force of the blow shattered his facebones.

I am stricken and can't let you go

When the heart is cold, there's no hope, and we know

That I'm crippled by all that you've done

Into the abyss will I run

He pulled his fist back and after a pause of a second he ran over to Katie while pulling out his combat knife, as he reached her he slashed the ropes free first from her legs and then from her arms, he yanked the gag out and pulled off the soaked blindfold.

Into the abyss will I run

I can't let you go

Yes I am stricken and can't let you go

He watched as Katie squinted in the sunlight before she finally adjusted, she scanned the room with her eyes, staring at the dead bodies of her kidnappers as they lay unmoving. Then her eyes settled on the green armored giant and noticing the red liquid on his fist she looked at him in fear.

He slowly reached up and hit the release for his helmet, pulling it off his head as he stared at her with emotion filled eyes.

(KATIE POV)

Katie's eyes bulged with shock as he she saw him. This was a trick right? There was no way this was him! Why would he leave her for two years if this wasn't a trick?

"This can't beâ€¦You aren't him. It's not possible!" she whispered into the air.

"It's me alright Kay, I'll explain later, for now, let's get out of here." He replied in the huskiest voice he had ever heard out of his own mouth.

It WAS him, nobody else had ever called her Kay, it was either Katie or Kate, never Kay.

But how was this possible? Nobody could have survived that crash.

(ALEX POV)

Now I'll have to tell her exactly HOW I survived that crashâ€¦she's going to think I'm insaneâ€¦although I am beyond insane by now.

She seemed to snap out of the shock though as I laid my hand on her shoulder and briefly pulled her body to mine. A Platonic hugâ€¦it felt so right yet so inadequate.

I decided right then and there, I was going to get her back and I was going to try my damnest to never let her go.

I kept my right arm held tight around her shoulders as I slowly led her away from the house; she leaned into the side of my armor as she relaxed. I picked up my helmet off the ground and hooked it to the back of my armor as I looked at her slowly falling asleep.

We were halfway through the field when I felt her collapse underneath me, I reached down and hooked my other arm under her knees and lifted, carrying her in my arms the way I hoped I would in the future under vastly different circumstances.

What the hell? I don't even know if she even can stand my existence and I'm already thinking of bells and a ring?

As I hit the tree-line I turned off to the direction of my Warthogâ€¦Katie would want to get home as soon as possible. I squeezed her closer to me as to protect her from the scratches that the tree branches would cause as I stepped over the natural earth. I walked and walked

-----SCENE BREAK-----

Location: Calm Springs, Alabama

I was cooking a small meal outside of my Pelican when I heard shuffling from the cargo compartment, leaving the meal to heat up for a few seconds I looked inside to see Katie slowly getting up and stretching. I was working on my meal at the moment so I left her meal on the bench of the pelican as well as a note I had written while she was asleep.

I smiled sadly at her and told her I would take her home soon once she finished her meal, returning outside I put the finishing touches on my rationed meal and prepared to dig in

(KATIE POV)

I watched as he left I don't know how but I could FEEL that he was sad that he was afraid? I never knew Alex to be afraid of anything. I reached over and picked up my meal. As I picked up the plate off the tray a piece of paper fell to the ground.

I leaned over and picked it up, curiously I opened it and read what was clearly Alex's handwriting.

Dear Katie.

I'm sorry, I was such an ass that night and I didn't even bother to take precautions, I was so absorbed in you I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing and I'm sorry. As much as I was focused on you I still should have taken the time to slow down and do what I needed to.

I was going to apologize for what I did believe me. But I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing and ran off the road down into that ravine.

I almost wished I had died that night, maybe at least then you wouldn't have to worry about me doing something stupid. I've done my best to straighten up, but I know I'm not perfect and I will probably never be as attentive as you.

I've become something completely different from what I was through a story you will never believe I know you would laugh at me if I told you so I am not even going to try to explain.

I've been watching you since I returned 4 months ago, I know I left you with something I shouldn't have. And that you probably hate me. I should have been able to prevent this from ever happening but I was in Florida.

I have been trying to avoid you for the simple fact that I thought you DID hate me but I have realized that I can't live without at least knowing if you do or not, at least then, as miserable as life would be, I would know.

So I leave you with the apology that at best, I left you alone with what I should have had equal responsibility in for 2 years, and at worst. Having lived...if you wanted me to die.

Love, Alex.

I cried, not only did he know about Aaronâ€|but he thought I hated him for it.

If there has been one thing I realized since he 'died' as I thought he hadâ€|it was that I could never hate him. Ever. If he thought or expected me to hate himâ€|he was going to be pleasantly surprised.

Forgetting all about my food, as hungry as I was, I walked outside to show Alex a few things, and then to tell him a couple others.

A/N: I do not own 'Stricken', Disturbed does. Please read and review.

Thanks for reading, SPARTAN-275.

End
file.